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Introduction: Youth, Cultural Practice and Media Technologies

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Since the early 1990s the impacts of digital media have increasingly been felt among different parts of society in both the developed and, progressively, the developing world. Not surprisingly perhaps, young people have been fast to acquire digital media devices and incorporate them into their everyday lives. Such early adoption follows a pattern that has been evident since the 1950s, whereby youth are typically seen to be at ease with and adapt quickly to emerging forms of technology (see Bausinger, 1984; Reimer, 1995). While we would shy away from propping up a ‘digital natives’ mythology (see Bennett et al., 2008 for a thorough critique), the specific features of digital media have seen their dissemination and uptake by youth proceed at an unprecedented pace. In particular, the interactive features of digital media and their combined capabilities – as communication devices, search engines, cameras, notebooks and so on – have given them a high level of appeal among young consumers.

As a feature of the digital media landscape situated at the centre of young people’s engagement with different digital media devices, the internet continues to have a profound effect. Through its intersection with the everyday practices of youth, the internet has brought new dimensions to what has conventionally been referred to as youth culture. In particular, the internet has served to redefine notions of public and private space (Lincoln, 2012) and the relationship between the global and the local (Hodkinson, 2003) while simultaneously giving rise to new ways in which young people frame and understand their interactions and associations with others. As we have argued previously (Robards & Bennett, 2011), rather than assuming that there is an easy distinction to be made between offline and online interactions between youth in the post-digital age, such interactions often

embody a merging of offline and online qualities and characteristics in a seamless fashion.

Such discernible shifts in the ways in which young people connect with each other, spatially, temporally and socially, are, in turn, giving rise to new questions about the definition of youth culture. Conventionally, youth culture has been regarded as something bound by geographical proximity and a collective affinity confirmed by collective visual displays of taste, typically through style, clothing and various forms of modification. Such forms of visually spectacular youth culture as this, manifested at the level of the physical neighbourhood or community, provided a focus for much of the early work on youth cultures and, as they were commonly termed, 'subcultures' (see, for example, Brake, 1985; Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). With the increasing importance of the internet as a means through which youth cultural practice is articulated and maintained, it is no longer the case that we can consider youth culture as a purely physical, locally bounded phenomenon. Thus, as Bennett observes,

we can no longer take it for granted that membership of a youth culture involves issues of stylistic unity, collective knowledge of a particular club scene, or even face-to-face interaction. On the contrary, youth cultures may be seen increasingly as cultures of 'shared ideas', whose interactions take place not in physical spaces such as the street, club or festival field but in the virtual spaces facilitated by the internet. (Bennett, 2004: 163)

At the same time, and as the chapters in this book will presently serve to illustrate, through the medium of the internet the forms of practice that constitute youth culture are diversifying to the extent that youth culture can no longer be regarded as principally bounded by elements of style. On the contrary, it could be argued that through the emergence of the internet a number of those more mundane practices often elided in youth cultural research have become new and significant foci for contemporary youth researchers. The collection of essays in this book is based on highly innovative research conducted in various parts of the world including Oceania, Europe, North America, Asia and the Middle East. Between them they consider a range of topics including friendship, musical taste, cultural production, subversive strategies, sport and leisure as these relate to online contexts. This is the first time that such an internationally diverse group of researchers and a diverse range of research topics have been brought together in a single volume.

That said, many of the themes and issues explored in the pages of this book speak to global and trans-local issues as these are experienced and engaged with by contemporary youth in their everyday interactions with the internet.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 focuses on the relationship between online and offline identities. In Chapter 1 Katie Davis considers the significance of friendship among adolescent youth in influencing their use of the internet. In a chapter that challenges some existing accounts of a separation between young people's online and offline identities, Davis illustrates how pre-existing offline friendships among young people both underpin the ways in which they make use of the internet in their daily lives and inform their understanding of what counts as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour online. As Davis also shows, the presence of friendship in an offline context also functions in driving young people to maintain a level of consistency in the identities that they project online and those that their friends associate with them offline.

In Chapter 2 Brady Robards considers how, given both the longevity and ubiquity of the internet and associated forms of online social networks, many young people today can effectively lay claim to having 'grown up online'. Taking the example of Facebook, which has now been in existence for ten years, Robards looks at how the archival aspects of Facebook provide a basis for young people to look back at themselves and reflect on their process of biographical and personal development since childhood and/or adolescence. As Robards notes, however, such characteristics of Facebook also present young people with some critical issues around aspects of personal privacy. Using Bowker's (2007) concept of digital trace, Robards looks at how young people are developing strategies to effectively manage and account for those aspects of their past lives that live on as digital traces.

In Chapter 3 Siân Lincoln focuses on the ways in which the internet has served to complicate previously held distinctions between private and public space for young people. Focusing on the domestic sphere of the family home, and within this the specific and ostensibly 'private' space of the teenage bedroom, Lincoln examines the impact of the internet and associated digital media in allowing young people to actively reach out beyond that space and to engage online with others in local, trans-local and global contexts. As Lincoln explains, rather than resulting in an anomic situation for youth in which distinctions between private and public space disappear and/or become meaningless, young people are rather empowered by digital media to the extent that they are

able to redefine and reinscribe space as private and public in ways that accord with their own tastes and lifestyle preferences.

In Chapter 4, Ian Goodwin, Antonia Lyons, Christine Griffin and Tim McCreanor look at how the internet provides a space of conspicuous display for young people in relation to their drinking practices. As Goodwin et al. observe, while young people, typically those in the 18–30 age range, are more likely to drink to excess than older drinkers, they are at the same time more prone to discuss and exhibit their drinking practices online, typically through online social network sites such as Facebook. According to Goodwin et al., while at one level the portrayal of drinking practices in an online context can be seen as an extension of the tales of drinking excess told in pre-digital contexts, on another level access to online mediums exposes young people to greater risks in terms of personal privacy and potential stigmatisation.

Part 2 of the book focuses on how the internet provides a space for engagement and creativity among young people. In Chapter 5, Kate Douglas and Anna Poletti conceptualise the internet not necessarily as a space in which young people can experiment with and/or deviate from offline identities but rather one in which they can engage in 'life writing', that is to say, in accounts of themselves, their lives, hopes and aspirations in everyday, mundane contexts. As Douglas and Poletti explain, the internet provides an important sense of empowerment for young people, giving them both the resources for the ongoing construction of powerful narratives of the self and an audience of like-minded peers who are willing to engage in discussion and exchange.

In Chapter 6, Carmel L. Vaisman considers how the internet is empowering young girls by providing them with spaces for cultural production within the domestic sphere of the family home. In a similar vein to Lincoln (2012; see also Chapter 3 of this book), Vaisman examines how the internet is serving to blur the lines between private and public space. In this sense, argues Vaisman, the internet allows young girls opportunities to become involved in cultural production without the necessity to enter those male-regulated public spaces in which most cultural production has hitherto taken place. In examining these issues, Vaisman draws on her recent research on Israeli girls' engagement with *Israblog*, currently the largest Hebrew-language blog hosting website.

In Chapter 7, Sun Jung looks at the significance of the internet for music fans across South-East Asia in the discussion and promotion of K-pop. K-pop is a hybrid genre of Korean popular music that draws on various contemporary styles including R&B, rap and dance music. As Jung explains, since its origins in the 2000s, K-pop has rapidly

established itself as a highly popular genre across the Asia Pacific. Jung's chapter considers the role of fans in the promotion of K-pop through their work to popularise the genre through various online mediums. According to Jung, the current success of K-pop cannot be disentangled from the role of fans in co-producing a trans-local audience for the genre and clearly demonstrates the increasing dependency of the music industry on its audience and their powers of online taste making.

In Chapter 8, Melissa Avdeeff examines how the internet is giving rise to new forms of eclectic musical taste among young people. Challenging existing criticisms of digital sound-carrying devices, notably mobile phones and iPods, as producing social isolation among youth, Avdeeff suggests that, conversely, such devices are creating new avenues for sociality as young people use them as a medium for discussing and sharing new music they have discovered online with their friends and peers.

In Chapter 9 Raphaël Nowak argues that the emergence of digital music files, despite their fundamental impact on the way in which listeners – and in particular young listeners – access music, must be understood in the context of a broader media landscape where a range of other playback technologies, including analogue technologies, continue to be used. As Nowak observes, among young listeners, different playback technologies are often evaluated in terms of the affordances that they offer. While digital soundfiles are easy to download and to use with mobile technologies such as iPods, analogue playback devices such as vinyl-record decks offer a warmth and are often more conducive to listening to music while at home. Thus, argues Nowak, it is not possible to essentialise internet-based music as having replaced in any holistic sense earlier forms of listening practice. Rather, all forms of listening devices must be considered in a broader context of material engagement.

Part 3 of the book focuses on the significance of the internet in relation to bodies, space and place. In Chapter 10, Adele Pavlidis and Simone Fullagar consider how the internet has offered opportunities for women's involvement in sport in ways that have often not applied to more traditional media forms where a more conservative view of women and sport has often held sway. Focusing on the example of roller derby, Pavlidis and Fullagar note how the recent re-emergence of the sport and the discourses that present and construct it as a women-only sport are largely down to the online spaces in which such work of representation has occurred.

In Chapter 11, Ann Werner looks at how young people are using YouTube as a way of involving themselves in the co-production of

youth culture through appropriating the style, image and dance moves of contemporary popular music artists such as Beyoncé and Lady Gaga. According to Werner, such use of YouTube, a major form of interactive online digital media, by young people can be seen as a development in the trend towards use of stylistic and other popular cultural resources in subversive practice that has long characterised youth culture. According to Werner, central here is the hypertext that creators of these videos use to discuss their practices and to link them to other videos and footage posted on YouTube.

In Chapter 12, Liam Berriman examines the relationship between young people and virtual online worlds through a study of the ways in which they are increasingly being used in the production of such worlds. As Berriman observes, the exponential growth in virtual worlds targeting children and young people in recent years suggests a growing appeal for such online forms of activity among these social groups. The active recruitment of young people to work in a consultative capacity in the production of online worlds, however, is a relatively new step, and one that sheds new light on the role of young people as prosumers in relation to digital technology.

In Chapter 13, Susan Bird looks at the importance of the internet in relation to flash mobs. Flash mobs are short-lived, apparently spontaneous gatherings in public spaces to perform acts of mild subversion. Using the example of Melbourne's 'Zombie Shuffle', an annual flash mob gathering, Bird considers the importance of the internet both as a means of organising flash mobs and for the retrospective sharing of feedback on flash mob gatherings. As Bird explains, through Facebook, short bursts of sociality can be organised that impact in a subversive, carnivalesque fashion on the urban landscape and the anonymity that often pervades there.

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